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Rethinking Education for Development in Africa: The Need for the Association of Dialogue for Development on Education in Africa (ADEA) to Step Up Its Role

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Abstract:

Education is unarguably the life-transforming agent for development of any society. To the extent a people is educated, to that extent is its level of development. Africa as a continent is no exception to this universal certitude. Africa, a continent duped the richest in the world's array of mineral resources is paradoxically tagged the world's one of most impoverished continents. Little is there to be seen as far as translating this wealth for the development and growth of the continent. Thus, while some countries in places such as Europe and Asia are adjudged as first-world countries, Africa has been tagged a third-world continent on account of its poor educational investment. This appellation reflects Africa's underdevelopment in the eye of the world. For some reasons, methods of education as well as the sheer will to place issues concerning educational matter on the front burners by relevant stake-holders seem to be at their lowest ebb. The world is focused on result-oriented education for development and empowerment. Africa must not be left behind in the pursuit of this liberator. On this, the role of the Association of Dialogue for Development on Education in Africa (ADEA) as an organ must be stepped up to allow for a dynamic and result-oriented approach to education be evolved. Thus, if the value-chains attributable to education in the global sphere are anything to go by for Africa, a new approach is crucially expedient.

Keywords: Rethinking, African development, empowerment, result-oriented, education

1. Introduction

Though Africa is bedeviled by myriads of problems such as poverty, high mortality rate, unemployment rate, poor governance leading to corruption, and various crimes of huge magnitude, it could be convincingly put forth that the solution to these persistent problems is tied to an educational approach that primarily focuses on individual and community development. There are quite a variety of approaches that could give Africa a starting point but the writer thinks that the efforts of the Association of Dialogue for Development on Education in Africa (ADEA) should be streamlined into concrete and practicable measures to meet the current realities of underdevelopment in Africa. This position is held against the backdrop that ADEA is an organization that comes out as a perfect conduit for harnessing potentials for effective utilization of resources for Africa by Africans given that it operates basically in partnership with ministers of education of each country within the African continent in collaboration with Non-Governmental Agencies on a global level. This approach would require a new approach that would demand an overhaul of present educational modules to allow for integration of both formal and informal education to have equal primal spots in the pursuit of development for Africa.

1.1. The Plight of Education in Africa

It is affirmed that of all regions, sub-Saharan Africa has the highest rates of education exclusion. Over one-fifth of children between the ages of about 6 and 11 are out of school, followed by one-third of youth between the ages of about 12 and 14. According to UNESCO Institute of Statistics data, almost 60% of youth between the ages of about 15 and 17 are not in schoolⁱ.

With such a magnitude of the population out of school, it is thus clear why Africa is under-developed in terms of manpower development and capacity building. Thus, the future success of the African continent lies to a large degree in its ability to hone the skills and talents of its ever-growing youth population. While it may be argued that the current education system in Africa uses outdated methods and is not preparing children for the future, it could well be said that all hope is not lost despite the grim realities of underdevelopment everywhere across the continent. In Nigeria for instance, a survey by UNICEF has shown that the population of out of school children in Nigeria has risen from 10.5 million to 13.2 million about 10.5 million of the country's children aged 5-14 years are not in school. Only 61 percent of 6-11-year-olds regularly attend primary school and only 35.6 percent of children aged 36-59 months receive early childhood educationⁱⁱ. In Ghana, UNICEF reportsⁱⁱⁱ that nearly 623,500 children of primary school age are still not enrolled in primary school and one out of four children in the kindergarten age range (from four to five years of age) are not in pre-school. According to

the 2010 national census, 20 percent of children with physical disabilities are not attending school. Also, according to a Green Shoot report^{iv}, around 56 percent of children in South Africa live below the poverty line.

Analyzing the state of education in Africa during the Accra edition of the World Innovation Summit for Education Matthew Opoku Prempeh (2018), former minister of education of Ghana 'Quality education remains an illusion to many of Africa's youth,' 'Access to quality education is one of the most powerful weapons available to break the poverty cycle for them. Thus, it is difficult to talk of development when more than half of the population is out of school. The need to synthesize what and what does not constitute education as well as identify appropriate methods for Africa are critical. Accessibility to, and getting quality education must go hand in hand. This explains the need for a rethinking on education. The on-ground operational mechanisms especially ADEA has a crucial role to play along with other stakeholders.

1.2. Appraising the Role of ADEA as a Tool for Rethinking Education for Development in Africa

The Association of Dialogue for Development on Education in Africa is comprised of a network of policy-makers, educators, and researchers across Africa and beyond. It relates and deals directly with African governments through their various ministers of education in conjunction with relevant non-governmental agencies with specific interests in education. Based on its capacity to foster policy dialogue and pool ideas, experiences, lessons, and knowledge across Africa and beyond, makes the organization a plausible tool that can conveniently serve as a catalyst for educational reform for the African continent. The Association is recognized today as being a major factor in the processes of dialogue, sharing, and learning for qualitative change in education aimed at promoting Africa's development.

One central principle underlying ADEA's philosophy of operation is its conviction that the responsibility for education rests with the governments of Africa and that the African governments have a task to wake up to this demand. This is why ADEA is concerned with fostering a process that empowers African ministries of education and makes development agencies more responsive to the concept of national ownership. ADEA's activities help strengthen policy dialogue between governments and agencies, between governments, and between development agencies. Its activities also enhance institutional and technical capacities within Africa by establishing networks for the sharing of information and the dissemination of successful strategies and innovations. Within this context, ADEA fosters regional, sub-regional, and cross-country exchanges as well as partnerships with civil society institutions^{vi}.

1.3. Rethinking Education for Development in Africa: What It Means

According to Krishnamurti Foundation Trust^{vii}, education is the process of facilitating learning, or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, morals, beliefs, and habits. This acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, morals, beliefs, and habits is ultimately dependent on the methods applied for the impartation of such aims. These methods are critical because they constitute a crucial part of what would become of the learner. Based on this, educational methods have been identified to include, demonstration, teaching, training, storytelling, discussion, and directed research. Education frequently takes place under the guidance of educators; however, learners can also educate themselves. Education can take place in formal or informal settings. Indeed any experience that has a formative effect on the way one thinks, feels, or acts may be considered educational. The methodology of teaching is called pedagogy^{viii}.

There is the need to acknowledge the concomitant importance of both formal and informal education in the African setup^{ix} if the said aim for development is to be attained in Africa for Africans. The view of Krishnamurti asserts that the right kind of education is not concerned with any ideology no matter how much it may promise a future utopia; that the best form of education should not be based on any system, however carefully thought out, nor is it a means of conditioning the individual in some special manner, readily comes to mind. Thus, to rethink education is to fine-tune education in the direction of result-oriented goals. There is no point planning for a tomorrow when today is already a catastrophe. It has to begin with effectively coping with the challenges of today before the sight would be cast against a tomorrow. Education in its true sense should be about helping the individual to be mature and free, to flower greatly in love and goodness. That is what the African continent should be interested in, and not in shaping the child according to some idealistic pattern whose outcomes may hardly benefit the advancement of the socio-economic milieu of Africa^x. The highest function of education is to build an integrated individual who is capable of dealing with life as a whole. This means the ability to evolve solutions to issues of life daily and not to be saddled with some abstract constituent. To advocate for and African education that would help reduce all-front problems affecting the continent, the approach as championed by John Dewey, a 20th American Educational revolutionist, readily comes to mind. Dewey summed up his view on a result-oriented education in his book: *Democracy and Education*. Dewey sees education not as a preparation for the future but essentially as a preparation for life. Education should equip the learner with the necessary skills to confront problems of life daily and not dwell on a preoccupation with a future (which often remains largely unknown) in most cases. Lifelong education is the key and the most critical need of Africa at the moment.

1.4. Developing Educational Module That Suits Africa for Growth and Development

In a bid to evolve an education that would result in growth and development for Africa, experts think that the current system of education as is being practiced needs to be reviewed and if possible, its methods and approaches are changed altogether to allow for a more dynamic and learner-friendly approach^{xi}. This is because the present approach to education is characterized by shallow, theoretically and certificate-centered resumes; the present approach leaves the African learner with a utopian view of a society with little or no technical skills to effect any change for self-reliance. This is the bane of African underdevelopment. There is a huge dichotomy between the aims and goals of education in Africa as far as the question of human and capital development is concerned.

In the view of ADEA^{xii}, the sole aim of evolving a genuine pan-African institution for partnership between African ministries of education for effective training and collaboration with external partners is the responsibility of education that rests with governments of Africa. It advanced that the crucial roles of the African government in evolving an education that would be all-encompassing should not be underestimated. The sincerity of policymakers, as well as its implementers, rests more with government agents. This is why it is of uppermost importance for the best brains that are patriotic about the African project to be at the helm of affairs of governance.

Africa needs an educational approach that would advance for a lifelong experience of the learner. Thus, the best way to equip children and youth for the future is to place their learning at the center. The 2018 WDR explores four main themes: 1) education's promise; 2) the need to shine a light on learning; 3) how to make schools work for learners, and 4) how to make systems work for learning^{xiii}. How to implement these goals by the World Bank must be balanced with a quest for a result-oriented educational approach. This can be possible only when quality and accessible education is assured for all African children.

However, it should be borne in mind that quality without access will lead to inequality and exclusion because access without quality will limit the potential and would not bring [about] the desired results. Prempeh (Former Minister of education of Ghana) lamented that the current education system being practiced across Africa is essentially a standardized type. This is because every arrangement in terms of cohorts, years, process, all reflects a standardized curriculum. The only way out is to break the barriers of conservatism that exist in the education space to make proven solutions accessible to more people.

At a recent summit by ADEA under the theme '*Unlocking the World's Potential: Leading and Innovating for Quality Education in Africa*', experts were of unanimous voice that innovative approaches to learning could improve outcomes. Africa needs to make lifelong learning a reality, make it successive because people learn at different paces. The summit upholds that Africa needs to allow those who are potentially left behind. It is estimated that 10 million graduates enter the African workforce each year. By 2040, the continent's labor force is expected to surpass that of India and China^{xiv}. As a result, quality education is a central element in building an 'Africa beyond aid' and also serves as the backbone for its development and enduring prosperity. It is understood that Quality education has a multiplier effect which is crucial to achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

1.5. Rethinking Education for Growth and Development: A New Approach

From the above discourse, it is apparent that Africa is in dire need of a new and dynamic approach that should serve as a springboard for its growth and development. Thus, considering that education is the catalyst for the attainment of this noble objective, there is the need for a newer approach. The following steps are proffered as key to evolving a new approach for Africa.

2. The Need for a Redefinition of the 'Classroom'

The current concept of the classroom and its arrangement does not support the goal for an all-encompassing education that would lead to a liberating economy. To get the best results, education must adapt to the needs of the learner. Mostly the arrangement promotes concentration on the teacher and, hence it is a teacher-centered arrangement. A new scope of looking at the classroom must be evolved to accommodate other non-formal learning. According to Aicha Bah Diallo (a founding member of the *Forum for African Women Educationalists*), to widen access to education across Africa, three pathways to learning should be considered, including formal, non-formal, and informal approaches^{xv}, educators must now put into function the reality that beyond structured classrooms, knowledge can be acquired during conference-style seminars, community-based meetings, and, or even during group sports events. It is interesting to note that none of the latest measures is teacher-centered or built around a school desk.

According to a World Bank study^{xvi}, several factors can help to explain the educational 'choices' of African youth. These include the number of working adults in a household; parental education level; social norms; and location. Understanding these factors would help in creating efficient education methods to suit each unique circumstance. While putting these factors affecting the African youth into consideration, efforts must be made to scale up opportunities for vocational and technical schools as well as give primal attention to informal learning programs. Other flexible learning modules, such as online programs and virtual certification procedures should be expanded to allow candidates to put into practice the acquisition of a skill set to higher learning institutions for self-reliance and productivity.

3. Begin with What Is Working and Broaden the Intervention to a Wider Scope

There is no disputing the fact that Africa is going through a 'learning crisis'. Learning crises as defined by the World Bank, refers to a situation where more than 90 percent of children attending schools do not read at their grade level and or are unable to demonstrate that they have effectively learned the topic taught in the classroom. The World Bank averred that this is more common within Africa. Thus, Africa needs to effectively respond to a new era of prolonged emergencies to avoid sudden-onset conflicts as well as climate-related disasters. The advocacy is for proactive measures aimed at evolving innovations that would result in an improved response on a small to large scale given the right funding and resources with adequate support from partners from NGOs.

According to the World Bank Report, innovations to tackle the 'learning crisis' range in form and function. It advocates that attention must be paid to new instructional techniques leading to results-based financing instruments which must incentivize quality in the education sector. It further maintains that while no single innovation is ever a silver bullet, sharing knowledge about what's working and scaling successful interventions could accelerate improvements in

learning. Thus, the focus would be to leverage innovation through deliberate consideration of the prevailing factors prevalent in an environment. The report of the World bank further identified a three-step process for effective translation of innovative modules for education. First of all, it advocates that attention must be given to those types of innovations that tend to hold the best potential in terms of outcome. Secondly, such modules should be tested within a specific context to ascertain their workability. Finally, depending on the results, adapt and scale them to other contexts. It is conceived that this scaling process will offer up new evidence of an innovation's ability to the mainstream in larger education systems. By scaling it does not only mean increasing the number of beneficiaries, but also accounting for steps such as adding new services to an existing package of interventions, forming new alliances with government and donor partners, and building team capacity

4. Finding a Balanced Way to Introduce Technology

In this age of modern technology where communication has reduced the world into a global village, Africa cannot afford to be left behind. Thus, a concerted effort should be made to ensure that the gap is bridged. Furthermore, there is no disputing that the introduction of technology to the classroom can offer vast opportunities in enhancing learning as well as improve data collection to drive down costs for programs. It must however be borne in mind that to fully harness its capabilities, investments in digital infrastructure and measures to expand teacher competencies must accompany educational technology. To facilitate the expansion of digital learning, governments should also establish common learning platforms and introduce regulations that support and enhance innovation. Also, efforts should be made to cut down the cost of internet services and make them affordable and within the reach of all. This could be achieved through a robust collaboration with high-tech companies in the telecommunication industry.

5. Conclusion

Africa is going through education and learning 'crises'. The way out as a solution is advocacy for a new approach rooted in the result-oriented module. This is achievable through a sincere and honest activation of the role of the organization for ADEA in collaboration with non-governmental agencies. The focus on a new approach to what constitutes the classroom as well as paying critical attention to technology based on experimentation is key to attaining a new and vibrant education system for Africa.

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